

Message Text

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AMCOSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 18151

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR IN BG
SUBJECT: FARAKKA, BORDER INCIDENTS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR
INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS

REF: DACCA 6283

SUMMARY: IN CONVERSATION WITH THE CHARGE DECEMBER 15,
FOREIGN SECRETARY JAGAT MEHTA SAID THAT BECAUSE OF TH
IMPRTANCE OF ATMOSPHERICS TO SUBJECTS SUCH AS THE FARAKKA
TALKS, THE INDIANS WERE CONCERNED ABOUT A "JARRING NOTE"
DIRING THE TALKS IN DACCA: GENRAL ZIAUR RAHMAN'S
INTERVIEW WITH AP IN WHICH THE EMLA ACCUSED INDIA OF
ATTEMPTING TO "DESTABILIZE" BANGLADESH. NEVERTHELESS, HE WAS
CAUTIOUSLY HOPEFUL REGARDING TALKS TO BE RESUMED. IN A LONG TOUR
D'HORIZON OF INDO- BANGLADESHI RELATIONS THE SAME DAY,
MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH, M. DUBE, TOLD EMBOFFS
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THAT HE IS "GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC" ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY
OF REACHING AN INTERIM AGREEMENT ON SHARING GANGES
WATER. DUBE CONFIRMED THAT THE INDIANS HAD IMPROVED
THEIR OFFER ON SHARING THE WATER FLOW. HE ALSO IMPLIED
A SOMEWHAT GREATER INDIAN INTEREST IN WORLD BANK
ASSISTANCE INTEHCNICAL STUDIES RELATING TO THE OVER-ALL

WATER SOLUTION THAT WE HAVE HEARD PREVIOUSLY, BUT STILL MAINTAINED THE GOI POSITION THAT OVER-ALL DECISIONS ON A LONG-TERM SOLUTION MUST BE REACHED BILATERALLY. DUBE IS THE FIRST GOI OFFICIAL TO TELL US SPECIFICALLY THAT ALTHOUGH THE ARMY AND THE BSF HAD NEVER SUPPORTED BANGLADESHI DISSIDENTS, "OTHER AGENCIES" OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD "ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED" THEIR CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES BUT WERE NO LONGER DOING SO. BOTH MEHTA AND DUBE SAID THAT THE GOI ACCEPTS THE GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL ZIA BUT HE IS NOT SURE THAT THE INDIANS HAVE CONVINCED ZIA OF THIS FACT. TO IMPROVE OVER-ALL RELATIONS IN THE LONG TERM, DUBE SAID, THE GOI MUST CHANGE ITS POLICY TO PROVIDE BANGLADESH WITH PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN ECONOMIC MATTERS. DUBE SAW LITTLE CHANCE IN THE NEAR FUTURE OF RESUMING TRANS-BORDER TRADE OR OF A RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS ON THE MARITIME BOUNDARY DISPUTE. END SUMMARY.

1. FARAKKA TALKS: IN CONVERSATION WITH THE CHARGE DECEMBER 15 FOREIGN SECRETARY JAGAT MEHTA SAID THAT TALKS ON A SUBJECT SUCH AS FARAKKA MUST NECESSARILY BE GREATLY INFLUENCED BY ATMOSPHERICS AND HENCE THE INDIANS WERE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT MEHTA DESCRIBED AS ONE "JARRING NOTE" DURING THE TALKS: GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN'S INTERVIEW WITH AN AP CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 8 IN WHICH THE CMLA SPOKE OF INDIAN EFFORTS TO DESTABILIZE BANGLADESH. MEHTA SAID THAT BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ATMOSPHERICS TO THE TALKS, EVENTS SUCH AS ZIA'S INTERVIEW WERE NOT HELPFUL. ASKED IF PERHAPS THE BANGLADESHIS VIEW THE BORDER INCIDENTS IN A SIMILAR WAY, MEHTA REPLIED THAT SIMILAR PEOPLE (E.G., GHAROS) LIVED ON BOTH SIDES
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OF THE BORDER AND ARMS WHICH ORIGINATED IN INDIA AND WERE LEFT OVER FROM THE 1971 WAR WERE READILY AVAILABLE. HE CONCLUDED, HOWEVER, THAT A SOBER ANALYSIS WOULD SHOW THAT THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS HAD DECLINED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE MONTHS. AS FOR THE TALKS, MEHTA PRAISED INDIA DELEGATION LEADER JAGJIVAN RAM FOR KNOWING HIS SUBJECT WELL AND SAID THAT ALTHOUGH RAM WAS A MAN OF FEW WORDS HE WAS MOST EFFECTIVE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. HE WAS CAUTIOUSLY HOPEFUL ABOUT FUTURE PROSPECTS.

2. M. DUBE, JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH AND ALSO A MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION TO DACCA, TOLD EMBOFFS THE SAME DAY THAT HE IS "GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC" THAT A SHORT-TERM AGREEMENT ON SHARING GANGES WATERS IN THE LEAN SEASON CAN BE REACHED WHEN TALKS RESUME DECEMBER 27. HOWEVER, HE ALSO CONVEYED IMPRESSION THAT INDIANS FEAR THE BDG, FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS, MIGHT REVERT TO A HARDER STANCE. DUBE MADE THE POINT THAT THE

DACCA TALKS TOOK PLACE IN AN ATMOSPHERE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM THAT WHICH PREVAILED AT THE SEPTEMBER TALKS IN DELHI. THIS TIME, HE SAID, THE BANGLADESHIS DID NOT CALIM "HISTORICAL AND TECHNICAL ENTITLEMENTS" TO THE GANGES, QUESTION THE NECESSITY OF THE BARRAGE ITSELF, OR TAKE AN ACCUSATORY POSITION TOWARD INDIA. IN ADDITION, DUBE SAID, THE TECHNICAL PEOPLE "WHO ARE ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO HANDLE" WERE KEPT OUT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. BOTH SIDES, DUBE SAID, CLEARLY INTENDED TO TRY TO REACH AGREEMENT. IN DESCRIBING THE TALKS, DUBE SAID, HE WOULD NOT DISCUSS SPECIFIC FIGURES BECAUSE TO DO SO "MIGHT JEOPARDIZE THE NEGOTIATIONS". HE EXPLAINED THAT BOTH SIDES HAD SET OUT THEIR POSITIONS ON SHARING THE GANGES FORW ON AN INTERIM BASIS, THE BANGLADESHIS IN TERMS OF CUSECS, AND THE INDIANS ON A PERCENTAGE BASIS BUT USING CUSECS FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES. EACH SIDE HAD MOVED FROM ITS INITIAL POSITIONS, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT.

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3. THE POLCAUNSELOR ASKED DUBE IF IT WAS CORRECT THAT INDIA HAD PREVIOUSLY OFFERED TO SHARE THE WATERS ON AN EQUAL BASIS AS MEASURED AT HARDINGE BRIDGE AND THAT THE BANGLADESHIS HAD OBJECTED TO THIS DOWN-STREAM MEASUREMENT. DUBE DID NOT SAY THAT INDIA HAD SHIFTED ITS OFFER TO A FIFTY-FIFTY SHARING AT THE FARAKKA SITE (REFTEL) BUT HE DID RESPOND THAT WHERE THE MEASUREMNTNS WERE TAKEN WAS NO LONGER A KEY ISSUE. IN ASSESSING THE POSSIBILITY FOR AN AGREEMENT, DUBE SAID THAT THE BDG MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS A POINT BELOW WHICH THE GOI CANNOT GO IF THE FARAKKA BARRAGE IS TO FUNCTION AS INTERNDDED. WHEN DUBE DECLINED TO SPECIFY THIS MINIMUM FIGURE, THE POLCOUNSELOR NOTED THAT FORMER GOI IRRIGATION MINISTER RAO HAD TOLD THE LOK SABHA SEVERAL YEARS AGO THAT THE MINIMUM NECESSARY WAS 20,000 CUSECS. DUBE SAID THAT THAT FIGURE HAD BEEN OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS AND THAT SUBSEQUENT STUDIES AHD SHOWN THAT THE CALCUTTA PORT OPERATION IN FACT NEEDED UP TO 46,000 CUSECF

M RAO HAD RECENTLY TOLD GOI OFFICIALS HIS LOWER FIGURE RELATED TO WATER NEEDED AFTER CALCUTTA PORT HAD BEEN "STABILIZED." REGARDING THE BANGLADESHI DESIRE FOR A MONTHLY ALLOCATION OF THE WATERS, DUBE SAID THAT THE GOI COULD NOT AGREE TO THIS AS A SERIOUS PROPOSAL BUT THAT IT COULD PROBABLY AGREE TO THE STATEMENT OF A FORMULA THAT WOULD SIMPLY ALLOCATE THE FARAKKA OFF-TAKE FOR NON-LEAN SEASON MONTHS AS 40,000 CUSECS, IF THIS FACE- SAVING DEVICE WOULD SATISFY THE BDG.

4. DUBE SAID THE TALKS WOULD RESUME DECEMBER 27 FOR THREE DAYS. THE GOI, HE SAID, HAD WANTED TO CONSIDER FURTHER THE STATE OF MINISTER RAM'S HEALTH BEFORE ANNOUNCING THE DATE, BUT THE BDG HAD APPARENTLY ALREADY ANNOUNCED IT IN DACCA.

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AMCONGEN CALCUTTA
AMCONGEN MADRAS

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5. LATER IN THE CONVERSATION IN ASSESSING THE PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS ONCE AN INTERIM AGREEMENT IS REACHED, DUBE SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW THE NEXT STEP SHOULD BE REACHING A LONG-TERM SOLUTION FOR AUGMENTING THE GANGES FLOW. THE PROBLEM WITH AN INTERIM AGREEMENT, HE SAID, IS HOW TO GUARANTEE IT. THE LEVEL OF THE GANGES FLOW MAY DROP IN THE FUTURE FROM DROUGHT OR INCREASED IRRIGATION USAGE UPSTREAM. THE BDG, THEREFORE, WANTS A GUARANTEED MINIMUM NUMBER OF USECS WHILE THE GOI WISHES TO STAY WITH A PERCENTAGE SHARING OF THE WATERS, REGARDLESS OF THE LEVEL OF THE FLOW. FOR A LONG-TERM SOLUTION, THE GOI WANT TO CONSIDER ALL PROPOSALS EQUALLY, NOT RULE OUT SOME ON A PRIMA FACIE BASIS AS BANGLADESH HAD DONE IN REJECTING THE BRAHMAPUTRA LINK CANAL PROPOSAL. IN TURN, THE INDIANS ARE WILLING TO CONSIDER THE BDG SUGGESTION OF A STORAGE SYSTEM IN THE UPPER GANGES. DUBE ALSO SAID
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THAT INDIA WOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT WORLD BANK TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN EXAMINING SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF PROPOSALS. WHAT INDIA WILL NOT ACCEPT IS GIVING THE BANK OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDYING THE PROBLEM AND MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS. THIS, DUBE SAID, IS PROPERLY THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS. BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF REACHING A LONG-TERM SOLUTION, THE GOI MAY RAISE THE ISSUE AT THE NEXT ROUND OF TALKS ALTHOUGH THE FOCUS WILL BE UPON REACHING THE INTERIM STATEMENT.

6. BORDER RAIDS: DUBE ATTRIBUTED THE MISCREANT ACTIVITY IN TANGAIL, MYMENSINGH AND SYLHET DISTRICTS OF BANGLADESH TO QADER SIDDIQUI AND HIS PEOPLE AND SAID THAT THE PENETRATION INTO BANGLADESH WAS "NARROW." HE INSISTED THAT THE GOI DOES NOT NOW SUPPORT THESE MISCREANTS BUT ADMITTED THAT IT HAD DONE SO PREVIOUSLY. DUBE SAID HE WANTED TO MAKE CLEAR THAT NEITHER THE ARMY NOR THE BSF HAD EVER BEEN INVOLVED BUT THAT "OTHER AGENCIES" OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD "ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED" THESE DISSIDENTS. THERE WAS OPTIMISM THEN THAT BECAUSE OF RESENTMENT WITHIN BANGLADESH TO THE OVERTHROW OF MUJIB, THE DISSIDENTS MIGHT POSSIBLY BE ABLE TO COME TO POWER. THEIR INDIAN SUPPORTERS WERE NOW "DISSILLUSIONED" (AT FIRST DUBE SAID "DISHEARTENED") AND WERE NO LONGER PROVIDING ENCOURAGEMENT. ASKED IF THE MISCREANTS WERE OPERATING FROM INDIAN TERRITORY AND IF THEY COULD NOT BE CONTROLLED, DUBE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THEY "PUT A FOOT ON OUR SIDE" AND THAT THE BANGLADESHIS WANTED THE GOI TO STOP THEIR ACTIVITIES. INDIA HAS NOT DECIDED TO DO SO BECAUSE THE MISCREANTS WOULD BE "BUTCHERED" IF THEY WERE TO STAY IN BANGLADESH. DUBE DID NOT RESPOND DIRECTLY WHEN ASKED IF THE GOI HAD CONSIDERED BANNING THESE BANGLADESHIS FROM VENTURING WITHIN A CERTAIN DISTANCE OF THE BORDER, SIMILAR TO THE PROHIBITION ON NEPALI CONGRESS PARTY POLITICIANS IN EXILE IN INDIA. INSTEAD, DUBE REMARKED THAT THE GOI WAS GIVING NO SUPPORT OF ANY

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KIND TO BANGLADESHI POLITICIANS IN CALCUTTA WHO WERE ALWAYS MAKING DEMANDS UPON THE GOVERNMENT FOR ASSISTANCE. THESE PEOPLE, HE SAID, ARE AN EMBARRASSMENT BUT INDIA CANNOT SEND THEM HOME BECAUSE ARRESTS AND PROSECUTIONS ARE CONTINUING IN BANGLADESH.

7. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE: THE GOI ACCEPTS GENERAL

ZIA'S GOVERNMENT, DUBE SAID (AS DID MEHTA), BUT HE IS NOT SURE THAT INDIA HAS SUCCEEDED IN CONVINCING ZIA OF THIS FACT. RECENT EVENTS HAVE SERVED TO STRENGTHEN ZIA'S RULE, BUT THERE ARE POLITICAL FORCES TOWHICH ZIA MUST RESPOND AND THESE RESPONSES FREQUENTLY ARE ANTI-INDIAN. ASKED FOR HIS ASSESSMENT OF ZIA'S OWN VIEWS, DUBE SAID HE THOUGHT ZIA NOT ONLY WAS RESPONDING T POLITICAL IMPERATIVES BUT HE ALSO PERSONALLY SHARED SOME OF THE CONCERNS OVER INDIAN INTENTIONS. INDIA IS NOT INTERESTED, DUBE SAID, IN A RETURN TO RELATIONS OF THEMUIB ERA WHEN THE BDG SOUGHT INDIAN ADVICE ON POLICY MATTERS.

8. IN TERMS OF IMPROVING OVERALL RELATIONS, DUBE SAID IT WAS HIS PERSONAL VIEW THATT THE GOI MUST CHANGE ITS POLICY TOWARD BANGLADESH AND PROVIDE IT WITH PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF LONG-TERM AGREEMENTS IN TRADE AND JOINT INDUSTRIAL VENTURES. TRADE WAS CURRENTLY AT AN ALL-TIME LOW, BUT THIS DECLINE HAD BEGUN IN MUJIB'S ERA. DUBE THOUGHT THAT THE GOI HAD MADE A MISTAKE IN NOT HAVING INITIALLY ENTERED INTO A LONG-TERM AGREEMENT WITH BANGLADESH TO PURCHASE RAW JUTE, THEREBY RELEASING INDIAN LANDS TO MORE FOOD PRODUCTION, AND IN NOT CONTRACTING FOR BANGLADESHI NEWSPRINT EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SOMEWHAT DEARER THAN SUPPLIES ELSEWHERE. PROSPECTS FOR INCREASED TRADE, HOWEVER, ARE HAMPERED BY THE BDG'S TENDENCY FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REASONS TO SEEK ALTERNATIVE SUPPLIERS. DUBE MENTIONED THAT BANGLADESH NOW GETS ITS RAILWAY WAGONS FROM TURKEY AND KOREA ON CREDIT TERMS. HE ALSO CONCEDED THAT AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT TRADE AGREEMENT WITH BANGLADESH, THE PRC MAY BECOME ANOTHER COMPETITOR TO INDIA, POSSIBLY IN THE SUPPLY OF COAL. DUBE DID NOT EXPECT A RESUMPTION OF TRADITIONAL BORDER COMMERCE SOON

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BECAUSE SUCH ACTIVITY WOULD REVIVE THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE ISSUE OF SMUGGLING. ON INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT, DUBE AGAIN FAULTED THE GOI FOR NOT PROVIDING IN THE PAST MORE THAN MINIMAL FINANCING FOR JOINT INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES IN COAL PELLET, FERTILIZER AND CEMENT PRODUCTION IN BANGLADESH.

9. REGARDING THE MARITIME BOUNDARY DISPUTE, DUBE DESCRIBED IT AS "FROZEN" FOR THE PRESENT AND SAID THERE WAS NO SPECIFIC REASONS TO RENEW DISCUSSIONS. ASHLAND OIL HAS FINISHED THE FIRST PHASE OF ITS EXPLORATION AND UNTIL IT ENTERS UPON A SECOND PHASE THERE IS NO NECESSITY TO DISCUSS THE BOUNDARY. IN DUBE'S VIEW, BANGLADESH HAS INSISTED ON A BOUNDARY SETTLEMENT ON OTHER THAN THE EQUIDISTANT PRINCIPLE SOLEY BECAUSE IT HAD ALREADY LET THE ASHLAND CONTRACT FOR EXPLORATION IN THE DISPUTED AREA; THUS, IF ASHLAND WERE TO PULL OUT, THE DISPUTE MIGHT MORE EASILY BE RESOLVED. DUBE EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT THE BOUNDARY QUESTION REMAINS A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS IF NOT DANGEROUS PROBLEM.

10. COMMENT: DUBE'S POSITIVE AND REASONABLE VIEWS ON CURRENT

AND PROSPECTIVE INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS ARE IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE CANTAKEROUS OPINIONS OF HIS PREDECESSOR, J.C.

AJMANI. DUBE IS THE FIRST GOI OFFICIAL TO TELL US SPECIFICALLY THAT "OTHER AGENCIES" OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED MISCREANT ACTIVITY, ALTHOUGH FONSEC MEHTA TOLD THE CHARGE SEVERAL MONTHS AGO THE INDIANS WERE NOT HELPING THE BENGALI DISSIDENTS IN ANY WAY. DUBE IS ALSO THE ONLY OFFICIAL WE HAVE MET WHO HAS SUGGESTED THAT INDIA SHOULD BE MORE FORTHCOMING TOWARD BANGLADESH ECONOMICALLY, MAKING CONCESSIONS FOR THE SAKE OF GOOD RELATIONS. DESPITE HIS POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE, HOWEVER, DUBE SEES INDO-BANGLADESHI CURRENT RELATIONS AS EXTREMELY FRAGILE AND CLEARLY CONVEYS HIS APPREHENSION THAT THEY CAN EASILY BE DAMAGED FURTHER. MEHTA'S EMPHASIS UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF ATMOSPHERICS AND THE INDIAN REACTION TO ZIA'S INTERVIEW UNDERSCORE THIS POINT. END COMMENT.

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